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DEPATMENT FOR AF/E, CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PROP](#) [KPAO](#) [DJ](#)
SUBJECT: Djibouti: Director of State-Run Newspaper Removed in Dispute
with PM

REF: DJIBOUTI 279

CLASSIFIED BY: Niles Cole, Public Affairs Officer, Department of
State, PAS; REASON: 1.4(B)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On March 25, a dispute between political rivals within the ruling "Union for a Presidential Majority" (UMP) coalition spilled into the government-run daily newspaper, "La Nation," and led to the ouster of its Publishing Director, Ali Barkat Siradj, apparently at the behest of the Prime Minister (reftel). The incident was a rare public display of the internal politics churning within the UMP coalition, and also underscored the persistent lack of media independence in Djibouti. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) PAO met with Ali Barkat Siradj, the former Publishing Director of the state-run newspaper "La Nation" on April 7. Barkat stated it was his decision to publish FRUD President Ali Mohamed Daoud's remarks criticizing the Prime Minister. (NOTE. The Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) is dominated by the former ethnic Afar rebel leaders, but is currently part of the governing coalition led by President Guelleh. Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita is the country's most prominent Afar leader, and is a Guelleh loyalist. END NOTE.) The Prime Minister reportedly insisted that Barkat to run a rebuttal in the following day's issue. Barkat transcribed the Prime Minister's verbal rebuttal and ran the text in an unexpurgated article, complete with errors and run-on sentences. Many perceived Barkat's lead-in to the Prime Minister's rebuttal to be disrespectful and thought the unedited article made the Prime Minister look inarticulate. Barkat confirmed to PAO that this was his intention. In response, the Prime Minister reportedly demanded Barkat's resignation.

13. (C) On April 14, PAO met with Khaled Haider, the Director of Communications at the Ministry of Communications, who accepted Barkat's resignation. He stated that Barkat had faced considerable pressure from the Prime Minister since assuming the job in 2004. According to Haider, the Prime Minister pressed Barkat to turn the once weekly "La Nation" into a daily publication, but did not allocate additional resources or personnel to deal with the increased workload. In addition, the Prime Minister often exerted editorial influence and control, overriding Barkat's decisions. According to Haider, the incident that led to Barkat's resignation was the culmination of a long-running conflict between Barkat and the Prime Minister over the role "La Nation" should play in Djibouti.

14. (C) COMMENT. While unusual that the conflict within the ruling coalition was made public in such a fashion, this incident highlights the tight control the GODJ exerts on domestic press. Barkat claimed he ran the article because he wanted "La Nation" to

be a paper with journalistic standards, while the Prime Minister desired that "La Nation" serve primarily as a means of disseminating favorable coverage of government accomplishments. Ruling coalition politics and personal enmity between Barkat and the Prime Minister also likely played a role in Barkat's resignation. END COMMENT.

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